

Message Text

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64

ACTION ARA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE TEGUCIGALPA 4994

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SUBJECT: DEPARTURE OF CUBAN FIELD HOSPITAL

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 4949

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE PERSONNEL OF THE CUBAN FIELD HOSPITAL WHICH HAD BEEN OPERATING IN SAN PEDRO SULA SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF THE HURRICANE DISASTER DEPARTED FOR CUBA NOVEMBER 16. A POPULAR OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT FOR THE CUBANS HAS RESULTED IN STRONG NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ACCUSING SEVERAL HONDURAN MILITARY OFFICERS OF EXPELLING THE CUBANS WITHOUT PROPER CAUSE WHILE THEIR WORK AND PROGRAMS WERE UNFINISHED. END SUMMARY.

1. AS INDICATED REFTTEL, THE PERSONNEL OF THE CUBAN FIELD HOSPITAL WHICH HAD BEEN PRESENT IN SAN PEDRO SULA SINCE SHORTLY AFTER HURRICANE FIFI STRUCK, DEPARTED FOR CUBA BY PLANE ON NOVEMBER 16. ACCORDING TO NEWSPAPER STORIES A CROWD APPROACHING 1,000 WAS PRESENT TO SEE THEM OFF. ORATORS IN THE CROWD ACCUSED THE GOH OF EXPELLING THE GROUP FOR POLITICAL REASONS IN SPITE OF A SUPERB PERFORMANCE.

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NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS INDICATE THAT WELL WISHERS BROKE THROUGH

POLICE SECURITY BARRACADES TO GIVE THE DEPARTING CUBANS ONE LAST EMOTIONAL EMBRACE.

2. IN VIEW OF THE EMOTIONAL PUBLIC FAREWELL FOR THE GROUP SUBSEQUENT PRESS ARTICLES ARE FULL OF RECRIMINATIONS AND ACCUSATIONS. INCLUDED IN A FULL PAGE COVERING THE CUBANS' DEPARTURE IN THE SAN PEDRO SULA DAILY, TIEMPO, WAS A REPRINT OF A LETTER FROM GOH MINPUBHEALTH ENRIQUE AGUILAR PAZ TO JOSE GUTIERREZ, CUBAN MINHEALTH. IN EFFUSIVE TERMS AGUILAR COMPLIMENTED THE WORK OF THE MEDICAL TEAM, SAYING IN PART, "WORDS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO EXPRESS TO YOU OUR THANKS BUT THE TEARS AND GRATITUDE OF THE HONDURAN MOTHERS WHOSE CHILDREN WERE AIDED BY THE HARD WORKING MEMBERS OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION ARE ELOQUENT."

3. TIEMPO (NOVEMBER 18) ALSO PUBLISHED PORTIONS OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ADOLFO VALDIVIA, HEAD OF THE CUBAN MEDICAL MISSION. VALDIVIA IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE CUBANS WERE TOLD TO LEAVE BY THE GOH AND THAT CUBAN PLANS TO EXTEND OPERATIONS TO EL PROGRESO HAD BEEN CANCELLED "DUE TO A HONDURAN GOVERNMENTAL DECISION." THE TIEMPO ARTICLE CONCLUDED BY QUOTING VICE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH, RIGOBERTO ALVARADO, AS ESTIMATING THE MONETARY COST OF THE CUBAN EFFORT AT \$2.5 MILLION.

4. EL DIA (NOVEMBER 18) COMMENTED THAT THE CUBANS LEFT IN SPITE OF EFFORTS BY MINISTER AGUILAR TO RETAIN THEM. EL DIA QUOTES PUBLIC HEALTH MINISTRY OFFICIAL HUMBERTO PINEDA SANTOS (IN CHARGE OF MINISTRY AFFAIRS IN DISASTER AREA) AS ACCUSING SECOND MILITARY ZONE COMMANDER COL. MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA OF FORBIDDING, CONTRARY TO INSTRUCTIONS FROM MINISTER AGUILAR, THE MOVE OF THE TEAM TO EL PROGRESO. EL DIA FURTHER QUOTES PINEDA AS SAYING THE MINISTRY DID NOT WANT THE CUBANS TO LEAVE BUT THAT SOME PERSONS, IN PARTICULAR EDGARDO DUMAS OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF CORTES, HAD PRESSURED THE GOH TO EXPEL THE CUBANS. PINEDA ALSO SAID THAT COL. GARCIA HAD EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE CUBANS WERE ENGAGED IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING THE DISTRIBUTION OF CUBAN NEWSPAPERS.

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5. IN A RADIO INTERVIEW ON RADIO HRN NOVEMBER 18 A MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIAL COMMENTED THAT THE MEDICAL TEAM HAD LEFT THE GREATEST SHARE OF ITS EQUIPMENT BEHIND AS A GIFT TO THE PEOPLE OF HONDURAS.

6. COMMENT: IT IS CLEAR THAT THE CUBANS POLISHED THEIR COUNTRY'S IMAGE IN THE PUBLIC VIEW AND THAT THE HONDURAN MILITARY (AS OPPOSED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH MINISTRY) HAS

COME OUT OF THIS EPISODE LOOKING HEAVY-HANDED PERHAPS
A BIT PARANOID. HOWEVER, THIS IS BASICALLY A PUBLIC
RELATIONS QUESTION THAT IS LIKELY TO DISAPPEAR FROM PUBLIC
VIEW IN TIME WITHOUT MAJOR CONSEQUENCES.
SOWASH

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